System Operator

Great British Railways' Access and Use Policy

Discussion paper on how GBR will allocate and charge for access fairly to achieve the best use of the rail network

December 2025

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1 Introduction

The Railways Bill presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape Britain's railway into a system that delivers greater economic and social value for passengers, freight customers and the country as a whole. Great British Railways (GBR) will bring many separate parts of the rail system under one leadership, as an integrated rail body with public value at the heart of its remit. In a railway that will continue to have mixed uses – freight and passengers, local and long-distance services – GBR will take the lead in optimising that mix of services, working closely with all types of private and public rail operators to open access to the network to the uses that create the best value.

This is a major reform to how the railway is used, and it demands a new way of thinking about capacity and performance for the benefit of users. We need to make explicit the ongoing trade-off that the current model struggles to coherently and transparently address: what use of the railway best serves the public interest?

To achieve that with a new organisation and legislation, some of today's processes and rules need to change. GBR will need a policy that translates its statutory duties into a framework for real world decisions about use of the network in a way that gives everyone confidence. In June, the Department for Transport asked Network Rail to lead industry development of GBR's future Access and Use Policy (AUP). The AUP will be the structured framework for how GBR decides to allocate capacity, set charges for use, and manage performance across all users of the network in line with government strategies and its statutory duties. This paper focuses on the changes that will be codified in policy and contracts for all industry partners.

It does not take for granted how critical stability is to users of the current model. We are committed to preserving stable, long-term contractual rights in the framework we develop, keeping mechanisms that partners already trust to give certainty. Where possible, processes should be simpler. Where decisions are complex, they must be transparent, predictable, and well-evidenced – all ensured by the appeals role of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).

We're publishing this discussion paper in the context of the Government's legislation to illustrate the direction of future access and use decisions under the new industry structure, with the intention that a new policy will be ready for GBR to adopt promptly. By starting to design this policy now, we want to build confidence that key building blocks will remain in place throughout transition, and to create time for deepening our discussions with industry partners as they seek to understand how the new regime could work in practice.

We recognise that process and policy are only part of the change. There are important questions around capability, behaviour and organisational structure that matter to industry partners and will need to be developed in parallel with this policy.

We are committed to ongoing engagement, including a formal consultation on the draft AUP planned for 2026, to ensure the policy is informed by a broad range of perspectives and delivers the best possible outcomes. Meanwhile, we welcome wider responses to the ideas in this paper – a dedicated inbox accessandusepolicy@networkrail.co.uk will be open for feedback until we start to produce a draft policy next year.

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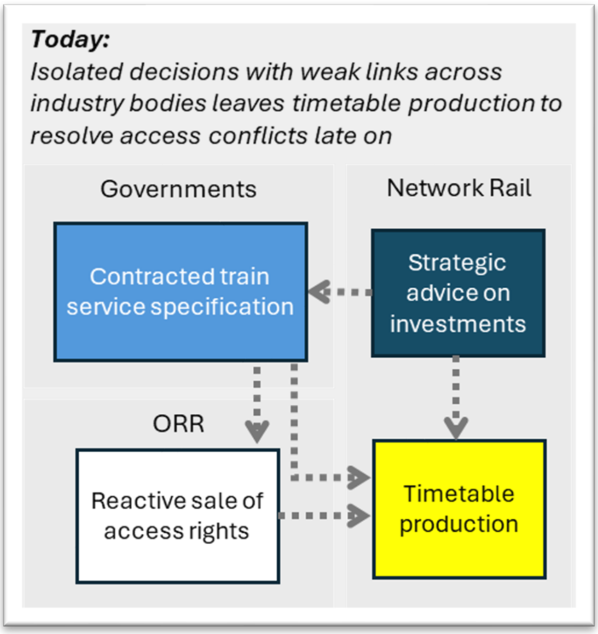
1.1 Today's challenges

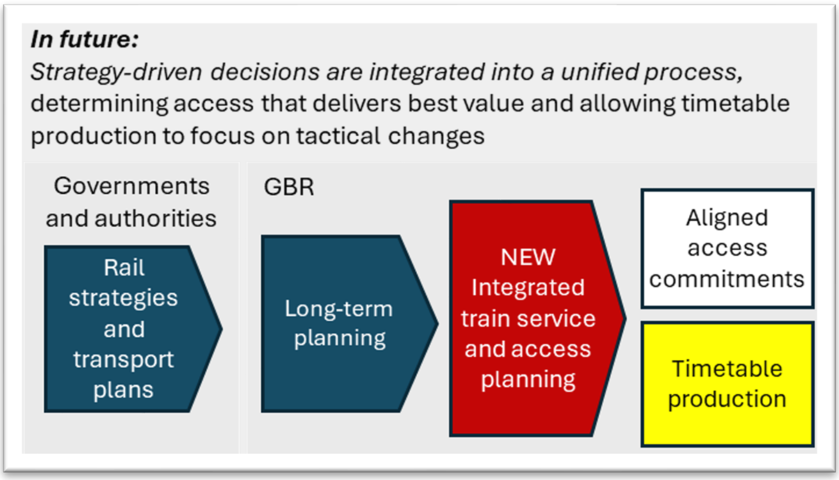
To get the most from the railway as a strategic public asset, we must balance competing demands for limited network capacity – ensuring reliability and delivering a timetable that meets user needs and delivers long term economic value for the country. Currently, decisions about how to use that capacity are not taken by one party, meaning no one can be held fully to account. Decisions about railway investment and railway use are not consistently aimed at achieving government strategies, defined outcomes or plans, and options are not properly considered. Instead, decisions involve multiple processes led by DfT, devolved rail bodies, the ORR and Network Rail, each using different criteria.



This leads to poorly integrated decisions with inadequate consideration of how market conditions, investment, and service business cases interact with capacity allocation and the timetable. Choices that deserve transparent testing and challenge are too often pushed into the last few weeks before new timetables are introduced, undermining advanced planning and resulting in costly and inefficient changes.

1.2 The opportunity now

The Railways Bill is designed to address today's deficiencies in planning and using the network, while building on what works. It establishes a new access regime, giving GBR clear accountability for delivering the best overall value from the railway, firmly in the public interest and guided by the strategic vision set out by governments.



The AUP will provide the framework for GBR to make strategic, evidence-based decisions about capacity allocation and service mix earlier than today, ensuring that economic and social value are central to every decision and building a solid foundation for tactical decisions.

This new approach will enable better advanced planning, more transparent trade-offs, and clearer accountability for decision makers. But it will not undermine the contracted commitments GBR has made to other users of the network. GBR must act transparently, fairly, and in the UK interest, with robust protections for third-party users of the network and a strong appeals role for the ORR.

2 Statutory duties and principles of the policy

The AUP will govern how GBR will meet its legal duties to make decisions, firstly about access – how the limited space on the network is allocated to different services and users to optimise overall value – and secondly about use – how charges and performance regimes are determined to incentivise punctuality, reliability and customer satisfaction. This section covers those duties and how they must inform policy development.

2.1 GBR's duties and AUP requirements

The Railways Bill sets out the strategic and funding framework for rail, and the duties that will govern GBR' decisions. These include promoting the interests of passengers and freight users, supporting the use of the network by freight businesses, and acting in the public interest – defined as delivering social and economic benefits from railway services and considering rail's environmental impact.

GBR is also required to promote high service performance, enable all industry bodies to plan their operations with reasonable confidence, and ensure decisions reflect cost efficiency and responsible use of public funds. The Bill acknowledges that these duties may sometimes conflict, so GBR must balance them according to the specific circumstances of each decision.

The Bill also places some specific requirements for the AUP. GBR must set out the procedure for applying to use GBR infrastructure and the criteria GBR will apply when deciding on those applications. This must be done in a way that balances competing demands for capacity while meeting GBR's wider duties.

Additionally, the Bill specifies that the AUP must explain how GBR will resolve timetable disputes, manage access for trains crossing the French border, and set provisions for planned disruptions and infrastructure works. We expect GBR's policy will deal with these requirements by referring to the criteria and procedures set out in access contracts, and specifically the Network Code, where the relevant terms and processes are currently defined. This will ensure that changes to procedures or criteria on these issues are matters of contract change, with appropriate contractual protections.

2.2 Principles for the AUP

To ensure these duties are translated effectively into policy and later capability, we're building our proposals on the following principles:

1. Enacting government policy

The overall strategic priorities for the railway will be set by Government. GBR's decisions about using the network must take account of that direction and high-level strategy of governments and funders and must reflect engagement with Mayoral Authorities as set out in the Bill.

For both devolved governments, the processes and criteria governed by the AUP must enable GBR to implement the statutory rail strategy of Scottish Ministers and the Wales Transport Strategy, in line with its statutory duty. Both Scottish and Welsh Ministers will be statutory consultees in the development of the AUP, and ongoing collaboration will ensure devolved priorities are reflected in GBR's decisions. Within England, GBR must have regard to the local transport plans of Mayoral Strategic Authorities and the London Transport Strategy, creating a statutory role in shaping how the railway serves their communities. Mayoral authorities may also work in formal partnerships with GBR to deliver their place-based strategies.

2. Directing and coordinating

The policy must enable GBR to take complex decisions about the best use of capacity using a transparent methodology, and then act with certainty. That means processes that build confidence, substantiated by proportionate analysis, and open to fair challenge – including contractual dispute mechanisms and independent appeal to the ORR. Challenge must be resolved promptly, to avoid paralysing or destabilising the industry from moving forward with confidence in future services.

Processes must also consider cross-boundary coordination with other infrastructure managers and connected facilities, who are a vital part of end-to-end rail connectivity and whose legal obligations and operational autonomy cannot be compromised.

3. Overall best use and value

It is fundamental to the new system that GBR works to deliver the strategic priorities of governments through basing capacity allocation decisions on economic growth, social and environmental value. GBR is required to advocate for overall benefit rather than prioritising its own services or financial position. As well as the needs of existing and future users, decisions on best use must also consider adjacent infrastructure managers, aspirations of major generators of rail traffic like ports and airports, and the local and national outcomes being sought by funders and public transport bodies.

When planning ahead for change, the benefit offered to rail users and the wider nations will be considered on a case-by-case basis, addressing the freight opportunities and passenger flows across specific geographies. As with all public bodies, Government Green Book provides an established structure for decision making. For modelling or economic analysis, GBR will use the standard government appraisal methodology that is already in use across the transport sector, supplemented with bespoke analysis when needed – for instance, if additional work can value strategic benefits from specific freight flows.

4. Fair and transparent

The AUP will set the processes and high-level criteria GBR will use to make access decisions on a fair and consistent basis – making clear how capacity decisions are based on freight and passenger interests, social and economic value, and how services fit with strategic direction. The strength of the AUP lies in making these processes transparent, so stakeholders can clearly see that assessment criteria apply equally to GBR's own services and all others, and how decisions will align GBR's responsibilities to funders, users, and society.

The AUP will also define the process for determining future access charges and performance regimes, including how and when GBR will make changes, what information other parties need to provide, and how they will be involved. This transparency will allow fair comparison and give confidence that the railway is being managed efficiently to deliver overall economic and social value.

5. Stable and predictable

The AUP will work best by providing a structured, stable framework that brings long-term consistency to access decisions. It will retain and build on key features of the current access framework where these are consistent with the Bill. The policy may need to be updated when government priorities change. However, it should be set at a level of principles, processes and criteria that can be applied repeatedly across different contexts over time, making clear how the evolving strategies and plans of funders are taken account of in different decisions.

The policy must give stakeholders a predictable decision-making environment that reduces uncertainty and brings clarity for long-term planning and investment, without destroying flexibility to change. That demands the AUP to set out capacity allocation as both proactive and reactive processes, and gives clear parameters of what, how and when charges and performance schemes may be applied to users.

6. Certainty for funders and operators

We intend to protect major features of the existing access system to provide certainty and confidence for users. We know these are important to many of our industry partners and propose these are fixed as the core of how policy will protect third parties:

- There will continue to be long-term access contracts, expected to be 5-10 years or longer.
- Capacity will be allocated as contractual rights, offering legal certainty, protection through contract law and contractual dispute mechanisms.
- Contracted commitments remain valid until they expire, even when future use of railway capacity is being replanned.

The policy must offer appropriate future certainty whilst supporting commercial responsiveness and recognising GBR has a legal duty to assess how best to use the network. This means it will need to solve specific challenges, like securing capacity for growth tied to specific investments, and ensuring commitments can be given on long distance passenger or freight flows during periods when local plans for capacity are being reassessed or updated.

7. Networkwide assurance

GBR should demonstrate how the AUP is supporting its statutory duties, with clear reporting to stakeholders. We recognise concerns about potential bias in service prioritisation, as well as the need to grow GBR's capability for consistently applying its policy. We're considering the best ways to provide active, transparent assurance, and think GBR should assess not just individual decisions, but their cumulative impact on the rail system and Great Britain. Transparency must be delivered by publishing metrics and well-evidenced decisions.

ORR will have an important role as the access appeals body and as a statutory consultee on the AUP. The ORR will work closely with Network Rail to support development of GBR's methodology for assessing economic value, bringing experience of running today's system into the future model.

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3 Emerging policy proposals

There are three new components of the framework that we explore in more detail through the next sections of this document and its annexes. This section outlines these components and introduces how they can deal with needs for stability and flexibility – a tension that decisions about the railway need to carefully balance now and in the future. We highlight areas where further development and input are needed, as well as early opportunities to simplify any current processes that add cost but little value to the whole system. It also covers the framework on future charges and performance schemes, as well as outlining the considerations for transition to the AUP.

- **Capacity planning:** A strategic process to align network capacity with long-term service needs and the strategic direction from Government. It involves evaluating the mix of potential uses against those strategic priorities to select the combination that achieves best social and economic value. The output is an Infrastructure Capacity Plan that designates how a specific part of the network will be used over time, including priorities for later decisions about ad hoc requests made during the life of the plan.

- **Capacity designations:** Infrastructure Capacity Plans will assign classifications to capacity that designate the intended rail market use, including strategic growth. Capacity designated to a use will in most cases be formalised as a capacity commitment to a specific party (see below). Designated capacity can also act as a guide to later decisions about ad hoc access applications and operational priorities. Designated capacity which is not committed to a specific operator will be retained for future commitment in line with its intended use.

- **Capacity commitments:** by reserving defined network capacity for certain services or operators, capacity commitments provide contractual assurance that capacity will be available as planned and treated equally to GBR's own capacity in the timetable production process, supporting long-term service delivery and investment certainty.

3.1 Capacity allocation

The industry needs a new allocation process that overcomes the inefficiencies of the current access framework with a more coherent, strategic approach. It must be open and agile to ad hoc requests at any time, while enabling all parties to contribute collectively to long-term planning that connects strategy deeply into the optimised mix of uses.

The legislation requires GBR to set out how capacity should be used in forward-looking plans, referred to in legislation as an Infrastructure Capacity Plan, alongside having clear procedures and criteria for any parties applying for access to the railway. This means introducing a proactive process of capacity planning that applies consistent, objective criteria across GBR and other operators, and resolves conflicts in use through a predictable framework of analysis that can be scaled appropriate to the change proposal.

At the same time, the policy must retain a flexible, agile process for all access beneficiaries to make ad hoc capacity requests when it suits their businesses – a process that is vital to the industry's ability to respond dynamically to new value-creating opportunities.

We introduce the core policy ideas for capacity planning here and go into greater detail in Annex 1. This outlines the two routes for securing capacity on the network: proactive planning and reactive allocation. Both routes propose a transparent, evidence-based approach, where applications from industry partners are assessed for credibility and then tested against key factors such as alignment with existing commitments, performance implications, strategic priorities, and the potential impact on public funds.

Economic, social and environmental contribution is set out clearly in new statutory duties as key to the public interest. This means that economic assessment will form a core part of GBR's process, alongside consideration of wider benefits. Economic value will be assessed using standard government transport appraisal guidance, which is already familiar across the transport sector. This will ensure consistency, clarity and a well-understood basis for decisions. Where appropriate, additional analysis may be developed to reflect specific benefits, such as freight growth, but the foundation will remain grounded in established methodology.

Detailed design is being developed with industry partners, including on governance, application requirements, and how to balance ad hoc decisions with wider planning. The aim is a system that is predictable, fair and trusted – one that supports government objectives, encourages private investment, and delivers the best overall value for the railway.

Proactive planning and capacity plans

Capacity planning is proposed as the central mechanism through which GBR will proactively allocate railway capacity. It is a structured, consultative process that converts long-term plans driven by strategy into allocated uses of the network.

Capacity plans are the output of that process, designating and describing the capacity allocated to markets or service types and regular engineering work in the medium and longer term. It is these long term, stable capacity designations that perform the function set out in the Railways Act for GBR to plan railway use and will give funders and operators certainty to plan and invest. All parts of the network will be covered by a valid plan, including a baseline plan set from the start of GBR that provides industry parties with certainty in line with their contracts.

Capacity plans will be accompanied by an indicative timetable demonstrating how benefits can be realised and to act as a base for the timetable production process. This is a major step forward to ensuring choices made at capacity level can be translated into deliverable timetables, which is not robustly achieved in today's system and creates uncertainty and overburdens the late stages of timetable production.

To ensure that routine adjustments, operational changes and new capacity allocations in response to ad hoc requests can be assessed and accommodated within the lifetime of the plan, GBR will also publish key information as part of the capacity plan:

- Evidence to support decisions, showing how the capacity mix delivers best value, based on strategic drivers, social and economic benefits, affordability, and constraints.
- Factors such as maintenance and asset resilience that may be material to future decisions on changing or adding capacity commitments for third parties or GBR

Capacity planning would begin with GBR publishing an outline scope that sets critical success factors for long-term plans and the geographic boundaries of the work. GBR would then seek stakeholder input to identify additional capacity needs that may become secondary goals for the work. Clear, measurable success factors for change are at the heart of the new approach. These need to be transparently based on strategic analysis and joint work with all public and private funders. Success factors must reflect GBR's statutory duties, including passenger interests, freight growth, economic and social benefits, train service performance, and public funds. By going through an open process of challenge and testing, success factors can be established to form a solid basis for later decisions.

A planning group including relevant industry aspirants and impacted parties would lead options development and evaluation, playing a key role in transparency and assurance. The group would assess different options for value and delivery of objectives, usually through a mix of GBR and other services. This provides a testing point that GBR is identifying economic and public value robustly, not just representing its own services.

To make decisions robust and transparent, capacity plans should be developed using a predictable methodology, applying the Government's Green Book principles and Transport Appraisal Guidance to evaluate economic, social, and user value – a single, comparable methodology for all transport decisions across public bodies, ensuring Government investment in freight capacity or Mayoral investments in buses or road facilities are not subsequently undermined by capacity decisions that value freight or connectivity on a different criterion. Specific factors on cost and value can be updated over time, and GBR will be able to develop bespoke factors as long as GBR and the sector are able to provide suitable technical evidence. A key area of further policy development is how to ensure analysis is proportionate and practical, avoiding complexity and cost.

New capacity plans should be scheduled only where there is a strong case for major changes to future railway use – for example, significant investment in fleet or infrastructure or major shifts in demand. More minor changes to capacity should be dealt with through a more agile allocation process that draws on existing capacity plans to keep strategic alignment but doesn't fundamentally change the evaluated mix of services delivering best value. The AUP will need to set out how GBR will assess the materiality and complexity of proposed changes to determine whether they can be dealt with as variations to existing capacity plans, or warrant replacing a current plan with a new one.

Coordinating change

To deliver changes in use effectively, GBR will need to align how the railway will be used – its timetable and service patterns – with other elements of change, including rolling stock, infrastructure, and operational changes. Getting this right is a major opportunity and will be transformation for the rail sector and overall value. Publishing a detailed schedule of capacity plans – building on today's Calendar of Events – would give visibility of when changes to use are proposed, their scope, and the strategic outcomes being sought, helping all industry parties to better plan and invest.

Capacity planning across local areas must also connect seamlessly, ensuring that longer-distance passenger and freight services are planned-in robustly and not displaced by local priorities and operators are not disrupted by network boundaries. Management under the AUP will focus on coordinating plans across business units, adjacent networks, connected facilities, and devolved authorities, with Mayoral Strategic Authorities working in partnership with local GBR business units. GBR will also act as a national advocate for freight, representing its interests across all capacity planning activity so the sector can engage efficiently without needing to attend every local discussion. Alongside a published schedule of capacity plans, inclusive planning groups and ongoing network coordination will give all parties clear visibility of how decisions interact and confidence that both local and national needs are protected.

3.2 Access conditions

The Railways Bill will give GBR responsibility for managing access contracts and conditions, although it won't hold its own access contracts once train operators in public ownership complete their transition to GBR. We know contracted rights are critical in shaping how train operators and infrastructure managers operate, plan, and invest. So, we need to keep what works well today while creating comparable transparency for GBR's own usage. When aligning contracts and conditions with the new allocation processes, there's also room to simplify the commercial structures and administration for the whole industry.

Here we introduce the core policy ideas of capacity designations and capacity commitments that will sit in access contracts and go into greater detail in Annex 2.

Capacity designations and capacity commitments

We're proposing to move from access rights to capacity commitments, while honouring existing rights. Like today's access rights, capacity commitments will have contractual effect, continuing to give the certainty that businesses need to plan and invest. But they also enable GBR to hold capacity commitments itself, which won't be part of an access contract, creating a transparent and accessible way to record and publish information about the capacity GBR holds and uses for its own services in a way that can be compared fairly alongside commitments contracted to other parties.

The first capacity commitments will come from the translated access rights that exist today, and in future, would be derived from the designations made in capacity plans or in response to a capacity request assessed against those plans.

We also want to improve the protection of capacity for strategic growth – such as today's often-eroded strategic freight capacity – and strengthen the link between capacity and investment, which can currently undermine confidence for private and public funders to invest in rail enhancements to deliver their goals. Our policy proposal designates capacity to a type of service, such as freight or connectivity to an airport. A capacity designation without an associated capacity commitment to a named party would secure capacity for future applications, whether that's linked to a specific investment, a local transport plan, or a growth target. Capacity designations could include key details like indicative train paths, service type, flex limits, and duration.

We think this model preserves stability and enables a long-term strategic use of capacity, supporting investment and simplifying timetable production. It would not be rigid, meaning it can also allow temporary alternative uses where they are tactically beneficial, so that capacity reflects current and future best use and designations don't block innovation or change.

This key policy choice for commitments and designations needs more detailed discussions on the level of control and detail useful for the AUP to specify, like whether industry partners besides train operators can be the beneficiaries of capacity commitments, and the terms for flex, duration, extension, and expiry. There's a big opportunity to improve how capacity, commitments and use are all published with the greatest transparency, and the extent to which capacity commitments might also serve to contractualise access to associated station and depot facilities.

Impacts to access contracts and conditions

Access contracts that form the legal relationship between Network Rail and train operators are expected to remain largely unchanged in structure. Existing Schedule 5 access rights will be preserved in contracts at the start of GBR, with updates made to existing contracts where essential to ensure they remain operable under the Railways Bill.

Vertical integration will reduce the contracts and administration for GBR operators over time, and offers the chance to consolidate and streamline many of the contracts held by other parties too. We still expect a large number of access contracts, so it's valuable to continue holding the common conditions in one place, as the Network Code and station and depot access conditions do today, allowing change to be managed under a single mechanism. We think that the existing committee voting systems will need replacing with a new method that enables GBR to update legacy conditions in a way that fairly protects contract holders, while allowing efficiency benefits from the new industry model.

3.3 Charges and performance

The Railways Bill defines what GBR can charge other operators for and requires it to establish a performance scheme. These schemes will commence for Control Period 8, starting in 2029. To deliver the legislation, we're proposing the AUP sets out a stable framework for the development of new schemes to ensure transparency, support investment, and reflect whole-system value.

Cost competitiveness and pricing stability are vital to industry parties that use the rail network – they influence modal choices and underpin investment in the railway. We know that current regimes provide valuable features that we want to retain, and which we will work with industry partners to develop.

There will be some important differences to the current model, however. GBR's own operators will not be subject to the contractual regimes, and GBR will set charges and performance schemes, rather than ORR. ORR will act as the industry appeals body with an enhanced oversight role. Under this new structure, the AUP needs to ensure fairness and clarity for industry parties as GBR designs and modifies charges and performance schemes, and to provide incentives for all parties to behave in the right manner. We outline these below and expand on policy proposals in Annex 3.

Scope of charges and performance schemes

Defining the scope of charges and performance schemes in the AUP will be a key protection for non-GBR users, providing certainty about how they will be structured and transparency about the factors that will define them. This will help operators plan with confidence and promote the regime stability that we know users of the network value.

For track access charges, we propose a core and ancillary package, the rules for which are set in legislation – including limiting what GBR can charge to costs directly incurred by the operation of services, and providing limitations around the charging of mark-ups. The core package would apply to all non-GBR users and focus on recovery of infrastructure wear-and-tear costs, while the ancillary package would cover charges that either support a strategic outcome such as discounts, or contribute to fixed costs such as mark-ups – where these comply with the requirements in the Bill. Legislation provides for more flexibility than today by giving greater scope for GBR to offer discounts, and we intend to develop this opportunity in consultation with industry. The design of both the core and ancillary packages would be based on clear definitions, such as eligible costs and apportionment rules for GBR's own services. Fixing this package for a minimum of five years would provide stability and limit variation between Periodic Reviews.

Performance regimes under the AUP will ensure that non-GBR operators are fairly compensated for both unplanned and planned disruption, with clear, consistent rules applied across the network. Compensation may cover revenue loss and direct costs such as replacement transport. This will also mean defining GBR's role as a clearing house for these compensation arrangements – administering calculations and payment to avoid bilateral agreements between each user to reduce complexity and give operators confidence in the consistency and transparency of the process.

All non-GBR operators will be offered a standard scheme appropriate to their market, with bespoke agreements where justified, consistent with competition law and available to others in similar circumstances. The scheme will also include reasonable penalties for poor performance and incentives for rapid recovery, incentivising efficient operations and supporting fair outcomes for all parties.

By removing its own operators from the scope of the performance scheme, GBR can focus design on what works for other industry parties. It will be able to design more effective ways of managing performance internally, tailored to business plan targets set by funders and creating a stronger focus on the performance being offered to rail users – avoiding many of the financial complexities that have hampered whole-system working under the privatised industry structure.

Priorities for the schemes

Charges and incentives should deliver value for funders, users and society, while also supporting longer-term industry strategies. We propose the AUP sets the priorities GBR will seek from charging and performance schemes, to provide clarity on changes to future schemes. Industry workshops informed the potential priorities for each scheme we detail in Annex 3, where stakeholders stressed the importance of customer focus, stability, predictability, and effective delivery of services.

3.4 Transition to the Access and Use Policy

The Bill sets the foundation for a new access regime, but successful implementation depends on a smooth transition. There is more detail on these proposals in Annex 4.

There will be considerable continuity – the Government has been clear that existing Schedule 5 access rights set out in contracts will be carried into future contracts. Many of the key industry processes, such as timetable production and access disputes, will also continue to be controlled by access contracts to provide certainty and familiarity. Changes to codes and conditions are contractual matters, which means they will be subject to specific control and scrutiny arrangements, with a clear role for ORR.

Where change is necessary, we're proposing transitionary arrangements that minimise disruption before the new access regime goes live and ensures GBR is ready to deliver from day one. Key preparations include designing and consulting on the draft AUP, setting up a baseline capacity plan to guide the reactive decisions about capacity allocation while new capacity plans are developed, and reviewing and updating existing access contracts to reflect the new system. We will need to work with stakeholders to explore what amendments need making to contracts to ensure they are operable under the new framework. The development of the access charging and performance framework for Control Period 8 will be separate but aligned with transitionary activity.

The industry parties that will make up GBR must also be able to continue live activities without disruption, such as timetable development and access applications. We propose clear cut-off points and transitional arrangements to ensure these activities continue smoothly and work for users of the railway.

Coordination with other infrastructure managers is also vital in advance of implementation to avoid disrupting arrangements that serve customers across all networks. Other infrastructure and facility managers will continue to operate under existing regulations, which means GBR decisions must respect their legal obligations and operational autonomy. We think mechanisms like bilateral agreements and non-discrimination safeguards will be needed to maintain alignment and stakeholder confidence throughout the transition.

4 Next steps

We'd like to thank all the stakeholders who've contributed to shaping these proposals. While there are differing views on the Government's proposed reforms, the ongoing input is hugely helpful in developing a policy that can work well across the sector.

There are several areas where further thinking is needed, which the annexes to this paper build out more. We'll continue engagement through the working groups and cross-industry sounding board that have proved so valuable to date, and we welcome informal feedback on any of this discussion paper to accessandusepolicy@networkrail.co.uk. A formal consultation will follow once a draft AUP is published.

Once established, GBR will work with the sector to develop the charging framework and performance regime for Control Period 8, which will set access charges for non-GBR operators, how performance is incentivised, and disruption compensated. We expect GBR will also discuss and propose changes to the conditions of use it will adopt and how it interacts with neighbouring infrastructure, where there is high value in simplifying these processes.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and working together to build a railway that's fair, transparent, and focused on delivering value for everyone.